

The structure of a theoretical research paper

Theoretical papers usually follow an argumentative pattern and are organised around the solution of a problem. Questions that are normally addressed in such papers include:

- What is the point/topic of the study?
- Why is this topic interesting/relevant?
- What has been done in the field so far?
- Is there any problem with what has been done/said so far?
- What is the problem with what has been done/said?
- What solution may be offered?
- Why is this solution good, or not so good?

Depending on the nature of the problem, such papers may be structured in different ways. A typical pattern of organisation is presented below:

Preliminary pages: These will normally include the Certificate of Research, an abstract, a title page (according to the format specified in the general section), and a table of contents, which includes the chapters of the paper and also the materials in the Appendices.

Abstract: A short summary of the topic and the main findings (max. 100--150 words).

Introduction: The introduction normally starts by introducing the subject of the paper and its relevance, that is, the reason why it is considered as an interesting issue to explore. This is followed by the statement of the problem related to the issue (i.e., the situation presented) and the author's position regarding the solution of this problem. The exact aim of the paper and the main research question(s) should be clearly formulated. (In theoretical papers, research questions relate to finding possible solutions to the problem.) The introduction generally ends with a brief overview of the analytical approach/strategy to be pursued and the outline of the thesis.

Review of literature: The aim of the literature review is to provide theoretical background to the solution of the problem anticipated in the introduction. It offers a critical review of the various treatments of the problem under investigation, enumerating arguments representing the body of literature both opposing and supporting the author's position. The survey should be organized into a logical framework invented by the writer.

Analysis (Solution): The analysis (i.e., solution) section offers a thorough and disciplined presentation of the possible solution(s) as envisaged by the writer. It should build upon the work of other researchers in the field, but authors are expected to come up with an original solution. All arguments/claims put forward by the author must be accompanied by some form of supporting evidence (e.g., examples, figures, facts, views of other researchers). This section ends with an evaluation of the proposed solution(s), showing that it is (or these are) exempt from the weaknesses identified in the opposing view(s).

Conclusion: Theoretical papers normally end by a restatement of the problem under investigation and a brief summary of the proposed solution(s) discussed. In the conclusion section, authors may indicate in what ways the study contributes to current achievements in the field, refer to the limitations of the paper, and point to possible areas for further investigation.

References: See empirical research papers.

Appendices: See empirical research papers.

(based on: Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (1994). *Academic writing for graduate students*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.)